The Indian Stage

Vol. I] SEPTEMBER, 1911 [No. 9

OUR LOOKOUT.

SCENERY ON THE STAGE.

A question with regard to which the most curious notions seem to prevail in this country is the part which scenery ought to play in dramatic presentation. The general impression among those not distinguished for any keen critical insight would seem to be that there are no principles regulating its use. It is nothing unusual in this country to see the stage crowded by all kinds of things, a miscellaneous heap of objects not brought with a purpose to dramatic effect, but for mere show—the most blazing and the most gay adornments are often paraded before a gaping audience which does not pause to consider the wisdom underlying the display.

It is often amusing to see the professional Stage-Manager straining every nerve, marring the naturalness of the dramas if necessary to enjoy the privilege of introducing some sensational spectacular effects. A flaring placard has been announcing to the way farers of this city, during the last few days, that a railway disaster will form the chief attraction of a theatre, on the occasion of one of its most cherished performances. The Stage-Managers would seem to argue after the manner of Mr. Puff in Sheridan's *Critic,* who on being asked by Mr. Sneer whether it was a sort of senate scene that was following said :

'To be sure ; there has not been one yet.' Nothing can be more injurious to the progress of the Stage than this hankering after meaningless spectacular effort, independent of dramatic necessity. Those who have visited some of the professional theatres in India, especially the performances of dramatic companies from the North, must have often been struck by the subordination of the dramatic spirit to stage scenery. There must be two or three striking spectacular shows in the course of the play, well, if the story does not admit of them, it will be mutilated and altered for the purpose. There shall be a meeting 'in thunder, lightning or in rain' if not for gloomy witches on the midnight heath as in *Macbeth*, at least for the delectation of an uncultured audience. A ghost shall rise from the nether world, and the flash-light shall play on a pale figure, not to give a solemn and impressive warning as in *Julius Cæsar* or exhort a wavering son to duty as in *Hamlet*, but to afford proofs of ability in scenic arrangements. If no use has been found for a fortress or prison-house in card board, there shall be a siege for its own sake or temporary imprisonment of the hero without any purpose being served by it. It is no exaggeration to say that this is the low level of the views on stage-scenery in this country, at least on the profes-

sional stage and every effort must be made to combat them effectively.

We should even be justified in assuming a more radical position and entering an emphatic protest against undue attention to gorgeous or even full scenic arrangement. The cultured spectator does not enter a theatre either to analyse the elaborate machinery employed for ordering the scenery, or the contrivances of science introduced by the Stage-manager. The glittering paraphernalia of the stage must not divert our attention in any degree from the essence of dramatic success, the excellence of the actor's Art. The introduction of elaborate realistic detail has often the effect of marring the dramatic atmosphere especially when it is of a romantic or idealistic nature.

Attention might here be drawn to an interesting controversy on this question carried on in the *Fortnightly Review* of a decade ago, between Mr. H. Beerbohm Tree and Col. W. Hughes Hallet whose name must be very familiar at least to the citizens of Madras, for his sympathetic rendering of Shakespeare's plays and his wide scholarship in the works of the dramatist. Col. Hallet assumed an incontrovertible position when he argued for the concentration of the attention of the audience on the *acting* more than any other aspect of the stage. His conclusion with regard to the staging of Shakespeare's plays can be applied with little or no limitation to the work of dramatic presentation in general. Under a system of gorgeous mounting, says the Colonel the actor knows that the attention of the audience is not concentrated on him, but to a greater or less extent diverted to scenery and costume. He may not formulate this in words, he may scarcely crystallise it in thought, but unconsciously he recognises it, and his art suffers. He loses life, loses earnestness, loses self-abandonment. He is always in danger of becoming subordinate to his surroundings . . . . The actor of those days monopolised the ears and eyes of the spectator, and knowing this he ran up and down the gamut of the passions in confidence that many at least would feel with him, producing effects not attempted now. In conclusion, he hopes that before long the reaction may come, that in the production of the poetic drama, managers may put acting first, and acting second and acting third, relegating scenery and costume to a purely ancillary position.' The truth underlying this observation must command the special attention of Indian Stage-Managers who are in danger of being allured to an undesirable extent, by the great mechanical advances made in the West in recent years. The opinion has been repeatedly expressed in those countries that the spirit of the drama is often being stifled by the weight of stage-scenery, and let India profit by this experience. The present condition has often made people long for the simplicity of the Elizabethen stage on which all scenery consisted of a sign-board. 'This is the forest of Arden, or (the Roman market place.)

It will not be out of place to refer here to a new theatrical movement inaugurated in Europe at the present day, by an eminent artist Mr. Gordon Craig, son of Ellen Terry. Setting up a severe ideal of simplicity and oneness in stagic effect, he has discarded all over-elaborateness and is making experiments in the most fashionable theatres on the continent in Germany, France, and Russia. He has discovered the majesty that

lies in large effects and he proposes staging all plays without any stage scenery except that of a single, solemn and impressive background, attuned in harmony to the essential spirit of the play. Two of his designs, one for a play of Shakespeare and another for the *Electra* of Euripides appear in the first number of the new Magazine started last year by the untiring journalist T. P. O'Connor. Their impressiveness is a strong argument in favour of the new creed, though with the meagre artistic talent available at present in this country, it should be difficult to make such experiments. But the work of this artist who would transform our theatres deserves close attention.

THEATRICAL REMINISCENCES—II.

Twenty one years before the footlights.

BY P. SAMBANDAM, B. A., B. L.

After settling the name of the Sabha, the first thing we resolved upon was to advertise the birth of the institution by means of a prospectus. The task of drawing up the prospectus was entrusted to me. I drew up, what I then thought to be—an ambitious programme for the Sabha. I set out therein all the evils which were prevalent in the professional stage, and how this newly born amateur society was to purge out all these evils. The prospectus was printed and I enjoyed the peculiar pleasure of seeing what I wrote in print—for the first time in my life—a pleasure which can never repeat itself in a life time in the very nature of things. I searched the other day for a copy of this prospectus, which I had preserved for a very long time and I was very sorry to find it missing. Looking back on these twenty-one years I can with some little pride affirm that most of the lines of progress then chalked out in that prospectus have been successfully carried out.

The prospectus was circulated broadcast in Madras. (Had we not a Secretary who was the owner of a Press?). With an eye to practical business I had joined an application form to each copy of the prospectus. We waited with not a little anxiety for the result of our first move. W. Muthucumarasamy Chettyar who thought that applications would come pouring in was very much disappointed, when he found that after a month, only a very few applications were received. Following my principle that we should always be prepared for the worst, I felt glad that we received even those few applications. It might have been worse, I told the committee members, and roused their drooping spirits by my optimism.

After securing a name for the Sabha we had to look out to secure a "local habitation," for it. This by no means was an easy task. Of course we could not afford to rent a building; and threatricals were looked down upon so much, that it was found impossible to secure a room in any dwelling house. We were in a fix—and I did the only thing I could possibly think of doing to get out of the difficulty—I consulted my father. I had previously told my parents of the starting of the Sabha, on the day on which it was started—there was not a single thought in my mind which I kept off from them. My father raised no objection, but my mother evidently did not very much relish the idea, she said, "What? acting dramas? putting on disguises?" So, one night, according to our usual custom when we were all chatting after meals, I told my father that we wanted a place for our Sabha. He at once came to my rescue—when did he not?—he told us that he

would place the premises of the girls' school of H. H. the Maharajah of Vizianagaram free of rent for two days in the week, for us to hold our rehearsals—Thursdays, and Sundays. Thus we got over the difficulty of securing a place for the Sabha.

At the next committee meeting I proposed a new rule that every member who had to appear for any University Examination (and most of us were students then) should be prevented from attending the Sabha meetings for a period of three months before his examination began. After the resolution was carried, I announced that I will not attend the Sabha from that date till my examination was over, and left the meeting. Our great anxiety in those early days of the Sabha was that it should not interfere with our studies, and that our parents should not think that we were allowing amateur theatricals to interfere with our studies. With that object in view, besides the above rule, was passed another that no youngster below eighteen should be permitted to join the Sabha without his parent's or guardian's consent.

In accordance with the rule abovementioned, I stayed away from the Sabha meetings for full three months, till my examination was over about the middle of November that year. During this period occurred the one great crisis of my life—my beloved mother's death—a crisis which left its indelible mark on me and my writings. When I attended the Sabha for the first time after my examination was over, I found the members very busy rehearsing "Indra Sabha"—the then popular opera the among Professional actors! Mr. T.J., the first member of the Sabha was "Oorvasi" and Mr. V. Nicker was "Santhana Maharajah." The stilted style of acting and speaking, the song which came in at every second minute, above all the "back song" or chorus behind the curtain, which repeated every line of every song which an actor sang on the stage, and the hideous Thalam or hand cymbals which was used to mark time, caused me the utmost surprise—to say the least of it. I was not in the cast of the drama, but I acted a character of my own creation that night—that of a thief! I waited patiently till the rehearsal was over by about 8 P. M., keeping my eye on the "Thalams" that were used. After all the members had dispersed, and when nobody was looking on, I coolly pocketed the cymbals and went home! At the next rehearsal when we all met, and when Mr. V. wanted to begin the opening song, and he called for the Thalams—of course they were not forthcoming; a diligent search was made everywhere and, like the thief who stole the hen in the proverb, I searched with the rest, but unfortunately or fortunately the Thalams could not be found. Then I quietly suggested, that as it was getting late, we might as well begin without the Thalams, and get on. It was the choice of that well known personality Mr. Hobson, and the actors went through their music that day without the Thalams. At the end of the rehearsal I casually remarked that it seemed to me that the music was better without the Thalams and one or two agreed with me. It took me several days of persuasion and argument before I tried to induce the chief actors to give up the use of the Thalams—and at last I was successful, and then it was I told them of the little theft I committed. This was my first step of reformation. My next and most troublesome step was to induce the members to give up their, "Indra Sabha" I had to take actor by actor aside and place before him the absurdities with which the opera—

for it was nothing but an opera—abounded. I explained to the members that music was not the one strong point, and that we should attach more importance to pure acting. The members had their revenge one day—they turned round and said. "If you reject everything like this, then it is your business to provide us with something good to act." It was the old story of Tennali Rama being told of his father's shradham. The members evidently remembered his answer. So it came to pass that I had to provide them with a drama. At first I tried the expedient of writing to several Tamil Pandits and requesting them to send some dramatic compositions. Only a few responded to my appeal and the few that sent in their specimens made me regret my having given them that trouble. They were all of one type—the good old one, of the King coming to the Durbar and enquiring of the ministers, whether it rained well, whether Brahmins were happy and whether the artisan class were doing their work properly and so on. So, being at my wits, end, one day after supper I approached my father. I told him that whether I wanted it or not, I had to write a drama, and asked his advice as to how I was to do it. The first question he put to me was whether I had witnessed any Tamil dramatic performance; my answer was of course an emphatic no. The next day he arranged to take me with him to a performance of Govindasamy Rao, then in the zenith of his fame. It was a Tuesday. For several reasons I think I should give you several details about the performance—for "Pushpavalli." the first drama from my humble pen was merely a reproduction in the chief essentials of the plot of the drama I witnessed that night.

A PAGEANT FOR MADRAS.

It has long been a surprise to us that the idea of starting the representation of Pageants was never considered in this city. To those who have watched the progress of the large number of Pageants represented in the west in recent years, their usefulness must be quite apparent. By its picturesque impressiveness a Pageant rouses a vivid interest in the past, and it is generally more impressive than the most brilliant records of history. We cannot conceive of any better means of making the citizens of Madras cherish a feeling of pride for the historic past of their city than by delighting them with the representation of a Pageant. The chronicler has done adequate justice to the Southern capital, probably even to a greater degree than to Bombay and Calcutta by preserving its history—a history more interesting than that of the other two cities. The early days of the East India Company by the side of the humble fishing village on the Coromandel Coast, the vicissitudes of Fort St. George, the military achievements of Clive and his compatriots and the growth of a small settlement into a magnificient city—there is enough material in this evolution for a hundred pageants. We are glad to see that the idea has been suggested in the Press—we extract with pleasure two letters on the subject addressed to the *Madras Times*. The suggestion has appropriately been made that the *Suguna Vilasa Sabha* and the *Madras Dramatic Society* should co-operate in the matter and try to bring about this interesting consummation. If an open-air pageant on a very wide scale were not possible, in the immediate future, we would suggest humble experiments on the stage of the *Suguna Vilsa Sabha* as a first step. We

hope that this suggestion will receive the attention of the committee and means may be found for its successful execution. The poet has made the city of Madras lament its fall from the proud position it occupied at one time.'

Clive kissed me on the mouth and eyes and brow,
Wonderful kisses, so that I became
Crowned above queens.
A withered beldame now,
Brooding on ancient fame

shall we at least not remind here by a **Paganr** of her happy days?

DEAR MR. EDITOR,

Will you through the medium of your hospitable columns permit me to make and elucidate a suggestion propagated by a recent visit to the Pageant of London at the Festival of Empire at the Crystal Palace and by the numerous articles and descriptions, illustrated and otherwise, which have during the past few summers fed the Daily and Weekly Press in Great Britain and elsewhere?

I make bold to suggest a Pageant for Madras!

A Pageant, I take it, is a visible and tangible expression in a form theatrical ceremonial, allegorical, symbolical, and imitative, of the pride felt by a community in the possession of one or more institutions or traditions. Of course, you will remind me (without referring to a dictionary) that a pageant meant originally a scaffold or platform, as likewise a show or play exhibited thereon. But, the word scaffold has now earned a more sinister meaning and the shows held there on are not the sort of pageant I refer to. My definition is that of the modern or latter-day affair. It may not be exhaustive and may not be strictly accurate but I have made it and I like it a little and there it is.

And why should Madras not have a pageant? Has she no old Institutions, has she no traditions over which she may glory and gloat? Why should she not have a pageant like London, or Conventry, or Chelsea or Quebec, or York, or Whitechapel? Is there any reason why not? Perhaps, you, Mr. Editor, or your readers, may be able to answer this question. I simply cannot. On the other hand, I can find many reasons why she should be permitted to indulge in the game. In the first place, Madras is old. This is of course essential, the idea of age being inseparable from pageants. Those into which Druids can be introduced are always first class pageants and lend themselves splendidly to the camera and cinematograph. Madras must certainly have Druids; some hoary old Mahommedans may easily be got to represent them. I know one estimable European gentleman who would make an admirable Arch-Druid and would doubtless enjoy the business fine. I anticipate no difficulty about Druids. Of course it *may* be urged that Druids are by no means of Asiatic origin and should logically have no place in an Eastern creation. We should like to meet this criticism at once by reminding such captious carpers (if any) that emigration has ever rolled from East to West and that the Druids must have had an Eastern ancestry; *ergo* Madras has more right to them (from the point of view of age) than such modern places as stonehenge. Ditto as to Gypsies.

Having therefore shown that Madras is old (for Druids and Gypsies must have been extracted from its vicinity,) I pass on to another reason why she should have a pageant. Wisdom and pageantry go hand in hand. Who can inagine a pageant without

its contingent of wise men? And Madras is wise. I anticipate the objection that she is only learned and that wisdom and learning are altogether different by remarking that a learned community must contain moie men of wisdom than an unlearned. Now, Madras is full of learned people. She has so many that Bee Yeas can be found filling the humblest positions. So much cannot be said for many Western cities. She is, therefore, a most wise city.

Madras being old and wise, what more is required? It is, perhaps, necessary for her to be a place of historic interest. And she certainly is this. No need here to go into detail, has she not had her Ragunath Rao, her Pachappa and Henry Cornish? Even may we drag in St. Thomas, Clive, and Roberts. These at one time or another have all resided here. All names of great historic portent more or less. Your readers, Mr. Editor, can apply their minds to listing other names great in her history—for me merely to point the way.

Again of crafts and trades, Madras has many which would lend themselves to enterprizing symbolism. Many of her industries may be indicated in the simplest manner—a great advantage, for it is clear that expenses must be kept down where possible. The fishery industry by the traditional piece of string and a key, the washing industry by a dobie's dodkey and a bundle toddy by a man with a chatty, nursing by a woman with a poopoo, shipping by a boy in a red coat, the glass industry by a tumbler. These are but poor details in the proposed pageant but I give them to point the way and doubtless the public will have many suggestions, *ejusdem generis*, to offer. As for myself I lay no claim to be a pageant master. You, Mr. Editor, would no doubt be far better able to tackle this job than many another.

It will be no easy matter to fix upon a site for the proposed pageant, so many being appropriate. One friend to whom I broached the idea suggested that it should be held near Kelly's. As being one of the oldest and best known insitutions in Madras, its selection as a pageantry site is no doubt peculiarly appropriate, but I am rather of opinion that Kelly's is too sacred a place to be desecrated by the "march of many feet." If my suggestion as to Druids is carrid out, it appears to me that it would be necessary to hold the pagent in some grove. A grove, I understand, to be a place where there are many great shops for ladies, *e.g.*, Westbourne Grove. It appears, therefore, that the Mount Road stands clearly indicated, or for the sake of convenience as near thereto as an open space exists. The final choice would probably be the Island—*lucus a non lucendo*.

I am certain Mr. Editor, that this suggestion of a pageant will be eagerly jumped at (if not upon) by our populace. Especially will the young ladies of all communities be proud to parade in the ancient habiliments of this presidency. Bands of Lumbady and Badaga ladies enriched with their magnificent neck laces and other articles virtue will not be difficult of enlistment. The Valsers of Vepery, the prancers of Porasawakam, the rowdies of Royapuram, the chosen of Choolai, will undoubtedly lend their assistance. Egmore, Cheput, and Kilpauk will send their fair damsels arrayed, may I suggest, in the distinctive garbs of their respective villages.

Messrs. Wrenn Bennett and Co., may be persuaded to lend their Father Christ-

mas and perhaps the organizers of the local Mohuram celebrations may oblige with a tiger or so.

I noticed, in England that it is customary for the celebrants to parade the streets in twos, threes, or more, in their pageant garbs before and after the show proper. This convention should be made widely known as it will certainly attract a goodly number of the fairer sex, and might, perhaps, be the means of gathering in some from Nungambakam and the Adyar who might otherwise be of opinion that the proceedings would be too slow for their co-operation.

As a last suggestion, perhaps, the Madras Dramatic Society and the Suguna Vilasa Sabha might co-operate with you in the matter. This assistance would be invaluable.

In making these suggestions for the proposed pageant it is, of course, understood that they are by no means exhaustive.

The details must be left in the hands of others far better qualified than my humble self to deal with such an important project.

Mr. Editor, for the painful assault upon your invaluable space. I write in the name of civic pride and for the enhancement of our local prestige.

HENRY HAYVERS.

SIR,—I have read with much interest the contributed article of Mr. Henry Hayvers, *re* a Pageant for Madras in your valuable journal of this date, and I quite agree with him in the suggestion that Madras "ought to have a Pageant" at least during the Coronation Darbar at Delhi. Some two or three years ago when there was so much unrest in Northern India and even in our Presidency, an England-returned brother of mine suggested to me that we could instruct the masses of this Presidency as well as others with loyalty if we were to have an "Historical Pageant of India" up to the present period and we even drew up a small programme of the same—dividing the History of India into three periods : W (i) Before the English came to India (including the Mohammadan period). (ii) After the English conquest. (iii) The present state of India (its industry, commerce, and other scientific introductions together with the other reforms, including Municipality, District Board, and Unions and Legislative Councils, &c.). He even suggested to me that the Government would be pleased to help pecuniarily for such a Pageant if we were to properly approach them and even H. E. the Governor himself may form part of the grand Pageant procession with his Council Members, &c. This scheme, although quite feasible, I had to abandon owing to the tremendous initial expenses one would have to incur on it, and as my brother left Madras for good I abandoned the idea altogether. About the beginning of this year I suggested to some of the members of the Suguna Vilasa Sabba—especially to Messrs. P. Sambandam and V. V. Sreenivasan—and they approved of the same and deposed that it will be a gigantic undertaking, especially when I unfolded to them the various items that ought to be introduced and all groups of characters must group themselves on platforms placed on wheels which have to be moved by electric or motor power on mono-rails specially laid for the same and such other shows, benefits which we have reaped in this Government, &c. We then came to the conclusion that one day or other the S.V.S. will have a grand Pageant, and thus consoling myself I had abandoned the idea. Now, Sir, that

your contributor of his own accord suggests that the Madras Dramatic Society and the Suguna Vilasa Sabha might co-operate and do the needful, need I say that it is the best suggestion one could make if there is to be a Pageant in Madras. As for your correspondent's idea of getting Indian girls to partake in such a procession it is ridiculous—nor do we require the rowdies of Royapuram and coolies of Choolai or such of the items he throws out. All we want is educated young men to take part in it and, of course, we shall take in the industrial and mechanical classes for the different shows—the rest Rajas, Princes and Princesses, damsels of different countries, &c., ought to be represented by men. For such an educative and instructive Pageant I own that if the M. D. S. and S. V. S. should co-operate they could do wonders. The S. V. S. have more that 800 members on their rolls, and I dare say we could count upon 300 or 400 members to take part in the Pageant, and if the M. D. S. could muster some European ladies and gentlemen to join the same, the Historical Pageant will be an established fact. As for the pecuniary side of it I would suggest that the Pageant should take place in a covered enclosure and gate money be collected, and funds so collected, after deducting the expenses, should be divided between the two Amateur Dramatic Societies in any proportion as the Pageant Committee should decide. Oh! I am running ahead. These are details when the S. V. S. and the M. D. S. approve and do the thing. Of course the first expenses ought to be met by both the parties unless some gentlemen come forward to advance the amount required. The site I would suggest is the S. I. A. Association grounds. It has a covered enclosure. The Corporation do not approve the yearly Carnival, the Association runs. Then why not a Pageant this year on approved lines and with everybody's consent? Let the Association be paid a decent amount for letting the grounds, say for three or five days. Of course the grounds must be left for management for a month before the Pageant begins. If this is not approved the Island ground is the next best, but for enclosing the same it will take a little bit and it will be wasted as it were. These are my proposals, and I leave it to the public to have a Pageant or not.

THE STAGE AS AN EDUCATOR.

By V. VENKATACHARI.

It is acknowledged that the stage with all its present environments is an educator. There is truth in such a view. The stage especially in this country had in recent years completely deviated from its true and primary function of educating the people into the mysteries of human nature and had become the veritable place for all corrupt and wild amusements shorn of wholesome influence on the minds of the playgoers. Men and women of every description, whatever may be their mental and moral equipments, dissipated youths who know of no other means of spending their money now-a-days freely resort to the stage quite innocent of its powers for good either from motives of questionable pursuits or from motives of pecuniary aid to eke out their livelihood. The following description taken from a writer is the nearest approach to the present day condition of our stage actors :—

"Of various men these marching troops are made,
Pen spurning clerks and lads contemning trade
Waiters and servants by confinement teased,
And youths of wealth by dissipation ceased
With feeling nymphs who such resource at hand,
Scorn to obey the rigour of command."

The real functions of the stage have been lost sight of. The sudden rise and fall of the curtain, the walking on the stage of an old man of rickety walk, the indiscriminate and unpardonable levity of the buffoon, all these pass for theatrical pleasure and theatrical instruction. The most grotesque invention of scenes and stories are freely indulged in, often times with an air of originality to suit modern tastes, and pleasures. The whole atmosphere is thus contaminated and it is but pardonable that a feeling of aversion to the stage has seized the minds of those who ought to have been the participators in the whole task which the stage has in all climes set before it. Despite the above draw-backs and imperfections of the present day drama, the fact remains that the stage has not a bit divested itself of its intrinsic merit as an educator and that the condemnation of the stage as a factor in the creation of a new life and in the opening the minds of the people to a vivid description of the realities of life—which are beyond the scope of study is wholly unjustified. We are not unfamiliar with the quacks who kill patients by misapplication of medicines but, we do not on that ground condemn medicines and refuse medical relief to dying patients. It behoves us therefore to go a little deeper and study the real functions of the stage vigorously laying our hand against intruders attempting to sack the benefits of the stage by the rcude weapon of their ignorance and superciliousness. It has been truly said that a nation without drama cannot lay claim to civilization. In other words the higher the refinement and culture of the nation the more marked is the spread of dramatic literature among them. This is amply borne out by the illustrious parts of our own country and by the history of Great Britain not to speak of Greece, Rome and other countries. Shakespeare still lives among the nation of the West and our own dramatist, Kalidas,a still charms the intellectual minds of the foreign nations. What Geothe wrote of the latter and of his marvellous production Sakuntala, falls on a line with what Milton wrote of Shakespeare. Civilization indicates the highest refinement of life and culture, a perfect knowledge of the secrets of human nature, a thorough grasp of the solutions for the diverse problems of life from a political, social, and religious points of view. Whatever might have been the real causes that led to representation on the stage, the idea that, "*what is seen is mightier than what is heard*" had given an enormous strength to the popularity of the stage as a fitting medium for "stimulating thought, refreshing weary minds, diffusing alacrity of spirit, and of hallowing common life with the charm of romance." According to a well-known Historian of the West "the stage is a faithful mirror of public taste, and explains the taste of the national mind." According to Sir Henry Irving "the stage will uphold in future as it has in the past, the literature, the manners, the morals, the fame and the genius of the country."

Another thinker says "what inspired great minds and delighted great men 2000 years ago and did the same in Shakespeare's day must have within itself a a principle of life superior to the whim and the fashion of the hour."

"Love for dramatic representation," said Sir Walter Scott, is an innate feeling in human nature . . . . in all ages theatrical art has kept pace with the improvement of mankind, and with the progress of letters and fine arts."

Johnson writes:

"The stage but echoes back the public voice,
"The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give,
"For we that live to please must please to live."

"No book, no other art, no more spoken address," says another writer, "no system of education, can so instantly and vividly burn and brand the memory with the realities of life and leave them for ever stamped and pictured in the chambers of imagery as can the acted play."

The late W. E. Gladstone once said "We cannot treat the drama as among the light amusements of the world . . . . . its social and moral effects must always be of the greatest importance."

The above extracts are sufficient to show that the all pervading influence of the stage had in all ages, and in all civilized countries considerably altered the main spring of life and wrought far-reaching changes in the domain of social, religious and political thoughts. A slight reflection will therefore show that drama can flourish only among intellectual minds. As a forcible perfector of education by precepts and examples, the stage must needs be handled only by intellectually capable minds. As a mirror of the age, as a national school though, the stage must have its functions discharged by men of superior intellect, wisdom and character. Greatest men were actors on the stage. Men of letters, and well-known writers were actors. The names of immortal Shakespeare, Sheridan, and Irving not to speak of others must always evoke in us a feeling of unqualified respect for the profession they followed.

With the help of such master minds we are on the fair road to recognize in the scenes and behind the scenes that are presented to us on the stage realistic exhibitions of the accomplishments of many years and the secrets of the springs of human life as if in a mirror. Passion, love, despair, and content are mirrored forth with a perspicuity and force that a feeling of sympathy for undeserved calamity is counterpoised by a feeling of the inevitable under stated circumstances. Quite recently, as many of you may remember, a special drama illustrative of the far-reaching changes made in the organization of the English army at home was improvised and put up in the stage. Men interested in the scheme attended the theatre to witness the actual working of the scheme. There are what are called dramatic moments and in these moments he concealed that theatrical pleasure and theatrical instruction which we eagerly seek after. The loss of the signet ring is of no consequence to us unless it be that it keeps the mind in anxious suspense as to what would befall its previous owner as a result of the loss. When the consequence actually ensues, we have a dramatic moment and we experience the corresponding feeling of day or sorrow. What an intellectual grief we feel when Sakuntala is sorry to part from her dearly loved deer whose then state of pregnancy converted her sorrow into one of anxious fear. We perceive the unison of human and animal affections engendered by familiarity and by the touch of human kindness. It is not otherwise possible than by a study of the character of Iago and his wonderfully successful machinations to conceive the idea that in the world there also exists the natural phenomenon of a motiveless malignity whose havoc would be as terrible as any other aggravated form of deliberate wickedness. Any amount of study of books can hardly give us an idea of the

excited condition of the City of Rome after the murder of Ceaser as adequately as the enactment of the scene in which Cinna, the poet at the very mention of his name is ruthlessly maltreated.

We feel as if we are in company with Duke Senior and realise the position he was in during his banishment when he says " Sweet are the uses of adversity"... and this life exempt from public haunts finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks and sermons in stones. It is true that the " rarer action is in Virtue than in Vengeance" but what in a practical illustration of this exquisite principle of life is afforded to us by the dignified attitude of Prospero towards those who aimed at his person and throne. After all " we are such stuffs as dreams are made on and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

How naturalized are these thrilling words emanating as they did from an ærial spirit.

Shakespeare, it is said, was at his best when he shaped the character of Imogen in the cave scene. What a splendid exhibition of child-like innocence and honesty of purpose even at the height of adverse circumstances and at the throes of imminent danger to life. Who can fail to recognise the historical value of the famous drama, Mrichakatika or the Clay-cart which abounds with astonishing touches of the current of natural life and natural sentiment. We hear of a well equipped and perfected Court of Justice with all the adjuncts of mordern days even in the remotest period of our national history. The duties of a king ere well defined and even a nightly burglar prides in his own innocent achievements. As a treasury of historical incidents the drama is a valuable heritage in our hands. Instances can be multiplied to show that the drama and the dramatic literature are invaluable exponents of a nation's intellectual advancement and social life and out of them incalculable benefits have always accrued to mankind.

It is true that the stage in India has hopelessly fallen into disrepute, owing mainly to the studied indifference of the educated public towards it. Sings are not wanting to show that a reaction had set in. The graduates of our Universities are slowly recovering from their mental torpor and in a right mood of assimilation, they are attempting to restore the stage to its pristine glory with all necessary improvements. By the help of English education we are in a position to know something of master-minds of the West. Let us sit at their feet and enrich our own literature by holding communion with great masters like Shakespeare who " is an intellectual ocean, whose waves touched all the sources of thought; within which where all the tides and waves of destiny and will; over which swept all the storms of fate, ambition and revenge; upon which fell the gloom and darkness of despair and death and all the sunlight of content and love, and within which was the inverted sky lit with eternal stars— and intellectual ocean—towards which all rivers ran and from which now the Isles and Continents of thought receive their dew and rain."

CORRESPONDENCE.

The Origin of the Suguna Vilasa Sabha.

Sir.

The following account of the origin of the Suguna Vilas Sabha will interest your readers in view of Mr. P. Sambandam's article on the subject. I have read the 1st chapter of Mr. Sambandam's "Twenty-one years before the foot-lights" and I am anxious to correct one or two inaccuracies in the account given by him. My friend Mr. Sambandam as you say is certainly the most authoritative member of the Sabha who can have a vivid insight into the institution up to the present moment from its early days. Mr. Sambandam mentions the psychological moment the inspiration came to him for the future S. V. S. Kindly allow me to offer to your readers my account of how the institution was concieved by me 22 years ago.

It was a bumper house. I remember even now the place where the old tile-shed of a theatre was erected, now replaced by a zinc one—the Chenga Bazaar Theatre. My father having left me to prosecute my studies in town, I used to frequent most of the professional theatres then in Madras with my two chums, *viz.*, V. Venkata krishnama Nayudu and Venkatakrishna Pillai—alas! they are no more. On this particular night we came to know that one Govindaswami Rao's troupe was to perform *Sakuntala*. We booked our seats and went in thinking it will be also one of the sort we used to visit weekly at one place or other. But the moment they commenced their "Nanthi and Nati" my eyes were practically rivetted on the stage.

As a boy I was always fond of the stage and I used to sing snatches of theatre songs and act in my study before my two chums any particular scene in a lady's part. On seeing this particular drama by this troupe I was so much enamoured by it that I conceived the idea of starting an Amateur Dramatic Society.

That night I hardly slept—neither did I allowed friends to sleep. I was acting in my sleep Sakuntala, Priyamvatha, Anusuya and all in turn and Oh! the future S. V. S. was conceived by me that night at No. 92, Thumbu Chetty Street—the thrice blessed birth place of my early joys. The next day I went to school. I was then a mere pupil of the then VI or Matriculation class. My first business was to inform my school friends of the performance I had witnessed and to dream of my future acting as a lady actor of the theatre I was going to form. Punctual to the appointed time my two friends picked me up from their respective Colleges and we adjourned to the Beach. We discussed the pros and cons of opening a Dramatic Society. I even acted on the spot in the dusk of the evening—Sakuntala—to the great amusement of my friends. We spent nearly three hours discoursing on the drama, and acting and I explained to them that I must act as a lady actor in a Society of our own. My friends consented. This was some six or eight months before Mr. Sambandam ever conceived the idea. You will excuse me if I take more of your space and inform you that after a few days of this incident one Appavu Pillai, a Tamil scholar and author of *Harischandra*, *Indra Sabha*, *Padmini Sabha*, etc., took the lease of a house some three houses away from the one where I was living and began rehearsing *Indra Sabha* and other dramas to be staged in Madras. I naturally attended one or two of his rehearsals and finally became a good friend of the

gentleman. One day my two chums informed him that I will act better than his heroine in *Indra Sabha* and on hearing it the poor man requested me to act a particular scene in it—as a boy I had my ambition to outwit the person who took the part of *Oorvasi* and began to act. The whole troupe was spell bound at my acting especially when I began to dance the light fantastic Hindustani steps which poor Appavu Pillai was vainly trying to put into his heroine. My success was complete. That night Appavu Pillai visited me privately and asked me whether I would undertake to act as his heroine for the opening performance of *Indra Sabha* promising that nobody should know of it and that he would inform his company that he had secured for the part one from the mofussil who would come on the stage only on the performance day. The temptation was too much for me. I was living all alone with a servant in a big house and there was nobody to question my actions, as my father was living then in the mofussil. Yet thank God I withstood the temptation remembering my father and the offence it might give him. Indra Sabha was then the talk of the streets. One could hear snatches of songs in every street. Madras was in a rage for it. I buried my ambition then to trade the boards of a professional dramatic society.

Thank God in those days we never failed to attend the performances of Govindaswamy Rao. I was driven to despair each night when I returned home after a performance to pander when I would be an actor. At last we three, myself and my two chums, made up our minds to hurry up matters and to open the Dramatic Society we long thought of. At this time the "Bellary Sarasavinodhini Sabha" visited Madras. This gave us a new impetus to hasten to open the Society. In my haste as a boy I suggested that we could open the Soceity with the three of us and being collecting members mostly class mates of mine, I even went to the length of procuring some two or three hundred rupees from my poor mother without nobody knowing of it. Then V. V. Nayudu suggested to me to consult Mr. Tirumalai Pillai my brother-in-law on the matter. The next day we three went to his house at Komaleswaranpet and consulted him. He advised us to consult his father, Mr. Basava Pillai, with regard to the advisability of opening such a Society and we approached him. He said it was desirable especially as there was no respectable dramatic company in Madras where one can take his ladies. At the same time he advised us that we were too young to do it and especially pointing to me he said that I would spend all my days in drama and singing alone without devoting my time to studies and asked us to consult others. The next day we engaged a hack and went out to consult. The first gentleman we called on was the late Mr. Vijayaranga Mudaliyar, father of Mr. P. Sambandam. We three went myself following in the rear. I was shy to venture and speak anything, lest he should also on the effects of the step on my education. Mr. Nayudu was our spokesman and he explained the object with which we came. He gave us sound advice and remarked that we must not admit young students lest we should spoil them. Mr. Nayudu happened to know his elder sons and he was speaking to them. Then it was that I first saw Mr. Sambandam—"The future hero of the Sabha,"—a thin-built youth—

appearing much younger than his years. I did not speak to him nor did my friend Mr. Nayudu introduce him to me. Perhaps he thought him to be too young to be consulted on such a matter.

Mr. Nayadu spoke with his brothers to whom I was introduced. The next day we went to the late Mr. Sivasankarapandiyajee and consulted him. He approved of our step to open the society and promised to address the public in case of our having a meeting. Then we went to the late Mr. Kanagasabai Mudaliyar a retired Sub-Judge and a friend of my father. He also advised us on many things. Then wedrove to the late Aiyasawmipillai and finally to the late Mr. P. Anantha Charlu. He was enthusiastic over the matter and among other things he asked us to engage female actors for the lady characters as it was very difficult to get boys to take up the place to the best advantage. This closed our consultation. I was all anxious to convene a public meeting and then to open a society and then to act, the lady—in any piece. I went to a gentleman, a friend of mine (I don't mention his name as Mr. Sambandam omits it) and secured his services for the Chairmanship of a meeting to be convened at Zachariah's High School Hall and drafted a meeting notice and signed my name with the names of my two chums. On reading the names again, I felt them flat without having even a single B. A. on the list. I have already told you that I was a pupil of the VI Form and my two friends were students of the Medical College studying for L. M. and S. None of us had even a F. T. S. to our name. Then my friends suggested to me to fish for some one with a title from the union—by the bye—I was then a Secretary of 'The Young Men's Progressive Union' located at the identical No. 92, Thumbu Chetty street. I thanked my friends for the suggestion and engaging a jutka ran uo to Komaleswaranpet and secured twp B. As., *viz.*, Messrs. Subramania Pillai now B. L. practising at Cuddalore and Amirthalingam Pillai, B. A. now in the postal Department and brother of Rao Bahadur K. V. Lingam of the same Department The former being a relative of mine I easily persuaded him to sign his name to the notice and through him of Mr. Amirthalingam. I even went to the length of securing these two gentlemen to speak at the proposed meeting. Mr. W. Muthu Kumaraswami Chetty was a neighbour and a friend of mine and we easily secured this our third B. A., to add to our list. Last but not least Mr. G. E. S. Chetty the then Secretary of the 'City Club' was added to the list of those who signed their names. With these names to the notice we sent it up to the press and printed invitations were sent to various gentlemen and to College students. The meeting was at 5-30 P. M. I was all in trepidation, ordered a garland for the Chairman, prepared a speech, dressed neatly, put on a turban and began to receive visitors to the meeting with my two friends. Some 30 or 40 students and some 8 or 10 turbans graced the meeting. Of course Messrs. Subramania Pillai and Amirthalingam Pillai were there in time. The Chairman opened the meeting. Messrs. Subramania Pillai, Amirthalingam Pillai, and V. V. Nayudu Spoke and I had also my say. Then the Chairman spoke as Mr. Sambandam has told you. We invited those who wished to join the proposed Society to sign. Among those who signed the paper was Mr. Sambandam. *I never*

signed the list for the simple reason I was one of those who signed the meeting requisition and neither of my friends had signed it. We gave notice to those who signed to meet at my place on a certain day and we met, at which meeting Mr. Sambandam was present. Mr. Muthukumaraswami Chettiyar was appointed as Secretary and he prepared a nominal roll in which either as I was the prime mover of the movement or by a fluke or with whatever motive he inserted my name first and it began to continue and it is thus and thus alone I became *the first member of the S. V. S.*

"Thus on the 1st day of July 1890—the Suguna Vilasa Sabha was born and I began my career as an amateur actor."

T. JAYARAM.

OUR BOUQUET.

Drama on a Large Scale.

The wordless drama to be produced at Olympia in London in December will be the largest thing of its kind ever attempted, not only in England but in the world (says the "Standard"). It will also be England's first chance of seeing artistic pantomine-drama on a really big scale.

There will be two thousand performers. The danger with productions of this kind is that the dramatic element may be swamped by mere pageantry and numbers. According to Mr. C. B. Cochran, who with Mr. F. H. Payne is responsible for the production, this will be avoided in the present case. "To begin with, the crowds will be acting crowds, not mere processions of people," he said, in an interview with one of our representatives yesterday. "They will be happy crowds, angry crowds, mobs under the sway of emotion. This is possible because among the two thousand performers there will be no idlers. About Christmas time there are great numbers of minor actors and actresses doing nothing because of the pantomimes. Thus we shall be able to get hold of them, and Max Reinhardt is to engage every individual himself. In this way the crowds themselves will provide genuine drama. But it must not be imagined that this is all. The individual parts are extremely strong, and the leading actors and actresses, who must be and who are to be absolutely first class people, will in no way be swamped by the witness of their background. For example, in one scene the leading woman character has to hold the audience entirely by herself for five minutes. When you remember that Olympia, as arranged for the performance, will seat 10,000 people, you may appreciate the magnitude of her task. She will succeed because she will be a great actress, and because also of the dramatic devices which Max Reinhardt—a master of dramatic devices—has arranged for that five minutes. I cannot at this stage give you names of members of the cast, but we are now in negotiation with a famous French actress for the leading feminine part. English people cannot take the leading parts, because pantomime does not come naturally to the English. The principal woman's part will be that of a nun, and the principal men will be a knight and a troubadour. The troubadour is to be a tragi-comic character, somewhat on the lines of Don Quixote. The plot is based on the German variant of a legend common to the Teutonic peoples. The scene is the interior of a cathedral on the banks of the Rhine, and the general atmosphere will be largely that of 'Faust,' though the plot is, of course, quite different."

Mr. Cochran gave our representative many interesting details as to the technical side of the production. One notable point of difference from ordinary drama is that, as in " Sumurun," the actors will enter the stage from four sides instead of the usual three. The cathedral, though based on no will be single example,early Gothic in architecture. Over its huge portals will be an organ, and then a great stained-glass window. When the cathedral doors are opened the audience will see the Rhine beyond, with villages coming down from the mountains and village children playing beside the river. The audience will be banked on three sides of the cathedral floor. This means that on two sides they will face each other but according to Mr. Cochran the light from above, below, and all sides will be so concentrated, and everything on the stage so thrown up in relief, that a member of the audience will see nothing beyond but the vaguest blue.

The personalities of the men behind the drama are interesting. Max Reinhardt, who, of course, made his name in London with, " Summurun," is known all over Europe for his large-scale productions. "In Berlin a production by Herr a Reinhardt quite overshadows the fact that Herr So-and-So takes such-and-such a part, " said Mr. Cochran. " He is the great handler of the big brush, and curiously enough began his career with bandbox productions of minute artistic one act plays. Even now, with all his passion for big things, he runs next door to his great Berlin theatre a tiny one, where he takes just as much delight in supervising the microscopic details of the performances as in all his wielding of the big brush. But he has drifted steadily to larger and larger things. The success of his immense production of Œdipus in the Schumann Circus was so great that he began to think of something on a still larger scale. At first he was afraid that he could not produce such a thing for lack of a building big enough. He was then delighted when he heard of our proposal for Olympia.

" Naturally the initial cost of a production on the scale we contemplate is great. We shall spend £ 20,000 before we take a penny. But then if it is a success—and we expect a success—Olympia will soon repay us, since we can take there £5,000 a day without inflating prices. There will be plenty of 1s. 2s. 6d. and 5s. seats and, of course, some more expensive."

MUSIC IN INDIA.

(From a lecture by Srimathi Indira Chanduri, published in the Indian Ladies Magazine.)

I will try to give what must necessarily be a rapid bird's eye view of the subject from the earliest down to the present time, keeping principally in view the influence exercised by music on Indian life. I must ask you at the outset to bear in mind these three points—(1) the antiquity and conservatism of Indian music; (2) its intimate connection with religion; and (3) therefore its wide and great influence in a country where religion plays so important a part in social life.

The goddess Saraswati is the presiding deity or muse of Hindu music and learning. She is represented as being very fair, robed all in radiant white, sitting on a white lotus, with a book in one hand and the *vina* in another. She is the patroness and beloved mother of all musicians and poets whose one dream it is to catch some faint echo of the enthralling strains of her *vina*

or one drop of honey from her immaculate lotus throne. Let me invoke her aid in this humble effort of mine to describe and illustrate her divine art.

The Sanskrit word for music, *Sangita*, used to mean singing, music and dancing combined; and the great god Shiva is said to have revealed it to humanity. In one of the old Sanskrit dramas there is a beautiful invocation to Shiva, which indicates how his dance symbolizes the rhythmic motion of the cosmos, and may be roughly translated thus :—

" Lightly treads the god, lest he should over set the universe ; he restrains his action, lest his arms should over-reach the boundaries of the three worlds : and his spark-shooting glances are turned on empty space, lest they should consume that which they rest upon."

The holy sage Narada is represented as roaming through heaven and earth, singing the praises of hari on his *vina*. The *Apsaras* or heavenly nymphs delight the eyes and ears of the gods with their dancing and singing. So that music, heavenly maid, must have had a celestial abode, like the holy Ganges, before she came down on earth to win the hearts of men.

Our oldest and most sacred literature, the Vedas, are estimated to have been composed about 2000 B. C. The following extract from McDonnell's Sanskrit Literature will give you some idea of the Music of that remote age :—

"Various references in the Rig Veda show that even in that early age the Indians were acquanainted with different kinds of music. For we find the three main types of percussion, wind and stringed instruments there represented by the drum (dundubhi) the flute (vina) and the lute (vina). The latter has ever since been the favourite musical instrument of the Indians.

...By the time of the Yajur Veda several kinds of professional musicians appear to have arisen, for lute-players, drummers, flute-players and conch-blowers are enumerated in its list of callings. Singing is, of course, very often mentioned in the Rig Veda. That vocal music had already got beyond the most primitive stage may be concluded from the somewhat complicated method of chanting the Sama-veda, a method which was probably very ancient, as the Sama ritual goes back to the Indo-Iranian Age."

The Sama Veda is still chanted, but I do not know how far the old melodies have been preserved, nor am I, unfortunately, able to give you any illustration of the modern style.

After the Vedic comes the Epic Age. The main story of the Mahabharata, or great epic of India, is one of the most ancient of world stories.

"Old songs about the ancient feud and the heroes who played a part in it must have been handed down by word of mouth and recited in popular assemblies or at great public sacrifices." The equally famous epic Ramayana is also said to have been 'either recited by the professional minstrels, or sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument, being handed down orally in the first place by Rama's two sons, Kusha and Lava.' Even to this day public and private musical recitations from the Epics and Puranas (old religious legends) are common in India.

In estimating the influence of music on the Indian mind, we must remember that apart from the natural and universal attractions of sweet sounds, music in this country, besides being inseparably connect-

ed with its poetry and religion, is further enriched by being the vehicle of its history. The chronicles of kings were preserved and recited melodiously by birds, such as famous *bardai* and *charuns* of Rajasthan. I believe every separate metre has a distinct way of being chanted, still extant in India.

But during the Buddhist period, the scene was changed. Buddha and his followers reasoned out and preached their doctrines and almost the whole of the resulting Pali literature was in prose. The Buddhist period was more fertile in architecture, sculpture and moral painting than in music; and the latter, divorced from religion, lost for the time its most powerful support and inspiration. But that it was not allowed to die out is amply proved by the literature of the succeeding period of Brahmanic reaction (approximately A. D. 500—1200), which was so brilliant as to have been called the Hindu Renaissance.

In this period we, for the first time, come across drama, in the European sense of the word, dramatic performances used to be held on the occasion of religious festivals, probably in the *Sangita sala* or concert-hall of kings, and including dancing and singing. From the internal evidence of extant Sanskrit dramas we come to know that the art of music was taught by Brahmin professors called Natyacharyas, not only to professionals, but even to the ladies of royal households, and many instances are given of their proficiency. Music also formed part of the education of princes, but they were more patrons than performers. One of the main functions of the Renaissance drama appears to have been the destroyal of Budhist monastic traditions, and the upholding of cherished Hindu social ideals. From the numerous Sanskrit works on music, it seems at this period to have attained a high degree of perfection, both as a science and an art, of which the Brahmins were the sole exponents showing the high estimation in which it must have been held. Indeed music has been called the Gandharva-veda and fifth Veda. And even now the highest class of musicians look upon it as a sacred art, and one of the roads leading to salvation, if devotedly persevered in. The temple and the stage were formerly the two great schools of Hindu music. During the popular festivals, singing and dancing also went on in the open air. This music had a character and influence peculiarly its own, and must have been the precursor of modern Indian folk-song, just as the music of the cultured must have given rise to our classical system. Durbari or chamber music, *i. e.*, high class music played by a single performer to a select audience, is however not yet alluded to. In some parts of India singing and dancing formed, and still form, part of the temple-worship. And though we have nothing like that in Bengal, yet who has not experienced the sense of holy calm and peace which steals over the mind when the mingled sound of gong and bell and conch is borne on the breeze at the time of the *arati* or vespers in the stillness of the evening. The conch deserves special mention, as, though it cannot produce music, it has a musical sound which is intimately associated with auspicious occasions and good-will in every Hindu house-hold, and it was also used as a trumpet-call to war in olden days. But I am running away from my subject.

We have now come down to the Muhammadan conquest, which ushered in a new era for India. The spirit of Islam is the

spirit of the desert; and its fierce Puritanism discountenances all appeals to the spirit through the senses. In Muhammadan mosques music has no place; and the drama was absolutely foreign, if not wholly repugnant to the new conquerors. Hence classical music was deprived for a time of its Court patronage. There is a characteristic story told of Aurangzeb, the great Moghul. The Court musicians brought a bier in front of the window where the Emperor used to show himself daily to the people, and wailed so loud as to attract his attention. Aurangzeb came to the window and asked what it meant. They replied, that melody was dead and they were taking him to the graveyard. The Emperor said "Very well, make the grave deep, so that neither voice nor echo may issue from it"! Nevertheless, the spirit of India slowly but surely prevailed, and music gradually crept back into Courts in the form of an entertainment for Muhammadan princes, some of whom became great patrons of the art. It is well known that Akbar the Great gathered round him the best musical talent of Hindustan, amongst whom, was Tansen, the greatest name in Hindu music. Thus the Durbari, or chamber form of music came into existence, and came to stay. This new departure, together with the Persian culture introduced by the Muhammadans, must have influenced the style of music, but to what extent it is impossible to say, though the difference between the northern and southern styles may afford some indication of its character.

The great mass of the people however, cling as fondly as ever to the old form of musical drama, known as the *Jatra*, which flourishes to this day. This is not a regular drama performed on the stage, but a simpler kind of operatic play, with some religious legend or national hero for its subject.

Along with these, musical and semi-religious recitations of stories from the Epics and Puranas, referred to before, were and still are common amongst the people, under the name of *Kathas*, which are performed by professional story-tellers known as *Kathaks*. It is still considered a pious act to have these Kathas recited in the domestic circle.

The *bhajan* a simple devotional song with every verse set to the same simple tune, has also held its ground along with the others, as being specially suited for private worship.

All these and other local types too numerous even to mention served in those illiterate days to keep alive the national ideals, and account for the remarkable permeation of the highest Hindu thought amongst even the lowest social strata, as with the decline of Sanskrit learning, the vernaculars became the medium of all Hindu thought and feeling.

About this time there was a great resurgence of Vaishnavism, and the Krishna-cult spread far and wide amongst the people, and though Vaishnavism, like Buddhism, was essentially a protest against the formalism and narrowness of Brahminism, its spirit was diametrically opposite. Asceticism and repression were replaced by the message of freedom and the joy of life. The life of Krishna plays upon the whole gamut of human emotion, from the love of the child to the love of God, and hence is peculiarly adapted in each of its phases to musical expression. Indeed it is not too much to say that the bulk of the innumerable songs of India have for their theme the immortal loves of Krishna

and Radha. Through the corridors of time we still hear the echoes of Krishna's flute, and he lives yet in 'our hearts our songs, and our poems. Like Orpheus, his flute is said to have had a magnetic influence, not only over human hearts, but also the forces of nature. I know a song which says that at the sound of his flute the wind stopped blowing, the river Jumna flowed backwards, the fishes stopped swimming, the cows stopped grazing, and the calf stopped taking it's mother's milk. How sweetly and naturally the human, super human are mingled in this, as in most of our simple religious songs, which go straight even to our sophisticated hearts! The Vaishnava poets, whose works are a veritable storehouse of all that is tender and true in love, have for their inspiration the same eternal story. As the name of the tune is given to each Vaishnava lyric, these must always have been sung, and are still sung to the music of the Kirtan, which is the Vaishnava's own particular form of musical expression. The Kirtan, at least in Bengal, is indeed a marvellous development of musical technique. It may be compared in some of its aspects to the European Oratorio, and in spirit and expression it is akin to the lyrical drama of Wagner. The Kirtan requires a whole band of well-trained performers and several hours of time for anything like an adequate rendering, so I am afraid no illustration can be given here.

With the advent of the English, Indian culture, including music, has entered into a new phase. Among the educated classes the old religious musical entertainments have almost gone out of vogue, though with the masses they are still popular. The *jatras* are more and more copying modern theatrical performances, with not very happy results. The theatres themselves, which have sprung up in dozens, are no doubt fulfilling some useful functions, but their effect on music has been for the most part deplorable, their characteristic tunes betraying an utter lack of style, and a considerable amount of *banalite*.

The Brahmo Samaj has given music a prominent part in its religious service, and has availed itself of the best in all styles without distinction, thus gaining a wide emotional range, and also helping to conserve much that might have otherwise died out.

European popular music cannot but have had a certain amount of influence on our modern music. I have heard some lively tunes on the Bombay side, which seem to have been borrowed bodily from the Portuguese, as well as several other adaptations which are locally described as being in the style of the band. The band with its loudness and liveliness seems to have caught the popular fancy, and was at one time considered quite the thing for marriage processions. Our own wedding-music is performed by a small band of pipers, the pipe being a sort of clarionet or oboe, whose sweet and touching strains are inseparably associated in the Indian mind with all festive occasions.

Occasional attempts have been made to introduce harmony into Indian music, an altogether radical departure, which requires a trained musician to handle with any degree of success.

Some Bengali songs have also been set to Scotch and Irish melodies, which, with a little adaptation, do not sound so very foreign to our ears.

A more subtle form of western influence may be traced in the modern tendency to

simplify and vary the Durbari style, by breaking away from some of its rigid conventions. Nevertheless, the classical style still survives in its purity, thanks to its devotees, who cling religiously to the established traditions, and account any departure from it to be a mortal sin.

On the whole, I regret to have to say, that our music is at present languishing for want of support. Our princes and noblemen are no longer as devoted to the divine Saraswati as they used to be, and even the few existing followers of the faith have to bow down to the modern King Gramophone, who seems to reign supreme.

The ubiquitous harmonium and piano have also changed the orthodox character of our music, and a certain kind of cheap drawing-room music, which can be easily learnt and easily taught, is superseding the old artistic style.

There are also, however, certain elements of hope, which it gives me pleasure to touch upon. Things are not so bad as in the days of our grandfathers, when music and singing were supposed to be an occupation fit only for professionals and ne'er-do-wells. The more music became an instrument of mere pleasure, the more it sank in public estimation. It is only very recently, and probably as a result of Western influence, that music has been reinstated in the Hindu home, and is coming to be valued as an Art in and for tself. Several systems of notation have been devised, and various musical publications are helping to preserve at least the outlines of the best classical compositions. And above all, the Indian heart still a tender spot in which the real music of India may find refuge, while awaiting the coming of the new Tansen.

Firstly, we have no such thing as harmony, or practically none; only the key-note, singly or in combination with dominant and sub-dominant, being used in accompanying songs, or filling out instrumental music. Indian melody, thus left to itself, has attained a much greater complexity and elaboration than its European sister. The apparently endless profusion of *Tanas* or cadenzas with which our melodies are adorned, partake more of the nature of an improvization than a mere reproduction, and that is why any system of notation can only hope to preserve the mere skeleton of an Indian musical scheme.

The teaching and learning of music by ear, is another great difference, which makes a good ear and a good memory much more essential in would-be performers.

The subject of our *Râgas* the *Râginis* is a large and difficult one, which cannot be adequately treated in a paper like this. Râgas are certain melodic types based on various modes and keys, differentiated by the sequence and prominence of particular notes. They require much study and practice, not only to render correctly, but also to recognize and appreciate. A point of considerable interest to the foreigner is that particular *Râgas* and *Râginis* are required to be sung at particular hours of the day, and the initiated really feel dissatisfied if the proper time is not chosen for its corresponding tune. Whether there is something deeper than mere association of ideas in this feeling, it is not for me to say. *Râgas* and *Râginis* are believed to be ideal beings in human form, and definite descriptions of them are given in Sanskrit books, who details of colour, shape and expression. Certain powers are also ascribed to

certain *râgas*, *i.e.*, the bringing down of rain, the breaking forth of fire, etc., and many are the interesting stories given in proof. But alas! the age of miracles is past, and there is no danger nowadays of anybody's setting the Hooghly on fire by singing the Dipak *râg*!

The so-called quarter-tones of the Indian scale seem to be a hard nut for foreigners to crack. Without entering into details, it will be enough to say that intervals of less than a semitone are never used in succession, and their only use is to introduce different degrees of sharpness and flatness in different *râgas*. This is why the tempered notes of European keyed instruments are not all-sufficing for Indian classical music proper, but are enough for all practical purposes in modern popular music.

Another obvious distinction is the gliding progression of our melodies, in which no abrupt transitions or large intervals occur. An anology may be found in a design composed of curves, as opposed to one consisting of angular or disconnected lines. Our songs are also definitely divided into two or four parts, and the composer's name used very often to be mentioned at the end.

OUR CRITIC.

Fate and Love. By Mr. P. Sambandam, B. A., B. L.

The Suguna Vilasa Sabha, 17th September 11.

The story of Yayathi, well-known to all readers of the *Mahabharata* forms the subject of Mr. P. Sambandam's *Fate and Love* and the author has taken advantage of the fine dramatic situations presented by the jealousy of two maidens and the wrath of a Brahman sage. We are however not sure, if the question of the absolute Supremacy of Fate, is the theme in the plot best fitted for the most prominent treatment from the dramatic standpoint. The events might have been presented with the aim of drawing pointed attention to the heroic self-sacrifice of Yayathi's son who consents to take on himself the old age of his father, in the full bloom of his youth. Or again, in the humiliation which overtook a royal maiden, who provoked the ire of a girl of the Brahmin race, there is room for the development of strong passion and the presentation of a pathetic situation. With probably a tragic ending, and with a study in contrasts, afforded by picturing Sarmishta in all her early glory and later fall there would be room for a fine drama. By elaborating the earlier incidents there would thus be the tragedy of the fall of a princess and by emphasising the heroic self-sacrifice of Puru, so vividly pictured by the author, there would be a play with an inspiring sublimity. In either case the dramatist would be enabled to avoid the necessity of conjuring up a Maharshi, only to give occasion to a story. We are prepared to grant that conversation turns on questions like Fate in the presence of sages, but the interview with the Maharshi is too slender a foundation for the superstructure—it is at least no strong aid to the dramatic action. But it must be acknowledged by even the most adverse critic that the play is striking in dramatic merit in individual scenes.

There was an innovation in the cast of characters, the younger generation contributing to the main work, and it was interesting to see that they could also maintain a fairly high level of success. Mr. Balasundaram who acted the hero, took great

pains to render the character, but could not unfortunately maintain a princely bearing, the action was characterised throughout by a dangerous and clearly marked tendency to deteriorate into the comic. We must also point out that there must be an effective check on his over-indulgence in music—he occupied most of the time himself, and was responsible for an occasional feeling of monotony and delay in action. But he gave strong proofs of his ability to sustain a big part and his clearness and strength of enunciation were distinct assets.

The heroine, Mr. Vadiveloo won the most unstinted praise on the occasion. Added to his naturalness and grace, there was a commendable lightness and ease in the acting. The true feminine expression, especially in the direction of tenderness and sincerity in love was displayed with very good success. Mr. Ramakrishnia in the character of the proud Thevayoni was good too, but it struck us, he might have been better, as the author's conception of the character gives great scope for dramatic effect. Yayathi's minister Kancheyan won keen appreciation for his good music but could not at all bow down his stiff military bearing to the position of a courtier and there was the amusing sight of a minister more over-bearing in his attitude than the royal master himself.

We have nothing but warm praise for the graceful dance of Mr. Rangavadiveloo at the beginning of the play, but we may be pardoned for the frank confession that we have no liking for the discordant effect produced by Hindustani music in the ancient Court of Hastinapura, and a large number of spectators who were charmed by the Moslem girl's beauty were not pleased to see her in the presence of a king associated with incidents in the *Puranas*. The selection of dress and music was thus rather unfortunately incongruous, and we hope such lapses will not recur again. It is not in the spirit of adverse criticism, but with an anxiety to see the actor who has shown an extraordinary aptitude for the art, acquire more skill in it, that we should like to make an observation. The ideal in this direction, must be the exhibition of positive skill in the movements themselves, by increased complexity consistent with grace and lightness, rather than the mere imitation of a simple dance.

We had recently occasion to comment on the indiscriminate use of music on the Indian Stage and we should like to draw the attention of those concerned to three concrete instances of inappropriateness which were brought home to us on the last occasion. A hunter can ill afford to indulge in music when the game is being kept at bay. Sarmishta's elaborate singing on the depth of her husband's sleep, standing by his side, can only have the effect of rousing him. Thevayoni thrown into the well, cannot be resisting the laws of gravity till Yayathi and Kancheyan finish their musical discourse on all the philosophy of earth and heaven.

We desire to take advantage of this occasion to congratulate Mr. P. Sambandam heartily on the continued energy displayed by the Tamil branch which has been entertaining the members at very frequent intervals—a result possible only with an active capacity for work and enthusiastic guidance.